

Rural Women's Participation in Development Programmes in Nigeria: Socio-Cultural Explanations from Vendeiyka Benue State

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Abstract

Successive governments in Nigeria between 1995 and 1999 designed and implemented women oriented programmes to develop their capabilities and empower them. The programmes focused on increasing their knowledge, skills, and participation in the areas of agriculture, home economics, education and politics, aimed at breaking down social barriers that have prevented rural women from taking an active part in community affairs and overall development. Unfortunately, these rural women are far from the scene of these programmes and could be seen as totally excluded. Against this background, it becomes poignant to address the issues that are affecting the rural women's participation in development programmes, in order to reposition them towards development of themselves, and consequently contributing positively to the entire social structure. Utilizing an empirical finding from a sample of 187 conducted on rural women in Vandeikya Benue State, this paper examined the implementation of women's development programmes in Nigeria, using Vendeiyka study to demonstrate the situation. The paper also identified and addressed the main cultural factors associated with the rural women's low participation in the programmes, and the relationship between expected benefits from the programme and the participation action. Based on the major findings of the Vendeiyka study, suggestions are made on how rural women's participation and contribution in development programmes could be improved.

Introduction

The most unique economic unit and enduring feature of the society is the family system. It is regarded as the cornerstone of the society, and also the basic unit of social organization and other arrangements. The family forms the central position in the structure of human organisation and fulcrum on which any meaningful development could be pursued and achieved. Due to the importance of family structure in the society, there is need for its sustenance and preservation, more so during the economic down turn of the nation, which brings hardship most especially on the families. When the social and economic strains challenge the stability of the family unit, the whole society definitely stands the risk of collapse. Similarly, when the

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women who are the prime movers of the family are excluded or incapacitated, the whole society also loses in the long run, which goes with an adage that if you train a woman you have trained a whole family and consequently the whole society. Considering the above needs presuppose the need for the improvement and strengthening of family cohesion through the promotion of social and economic well being of the entire family for its maximum contribution to national development.

The realization of the need for empowering families gave rise to the introduction of development programmes in various countries of the world including Nigeria. These programmes take different forms and dimensions depending on the exact need they are set to tackle. The needs are numerous, and cover almost all aspects of human existence, but the most prominent in recent times is one that is targeted towards eradicating poverty condition of the people, thereby making their lives worthwhile. However, the functions of those programmes that are targeted at eradicating poverty in the household and also advance development prospects of the entire society are mainly applied through extensive services methodology. They include facilities of development that benefit those who live in towns, which are extended to persons unable to benefit from them under normal circumstance. Fargular (1972) defines extension services as the extending of a service, or a system that extends the educational advantages of an institution to persons who are unable to participate in a normal manner. These methods of extending services and development programmes serve as the vehicle through which the poor, rural people make their transition from a life limited to local and less lucrative concern to wider interests including participation in national and international concerns (United, Nations, 2006).

It is important to note that the success of any development programme is dependent on the social participation of the target population rather than mere looking at the policy, goal and organizational structures that established such programmes. Hence if social and economic development policies and programmes are outlined, without the full participation of the target population, the whole programme could be regarded as non-start. Hoffer (1994) perceived social participation as a process in which individuals and groups identify themselves with particular activity or programme, within which the extent or magnitude could vary based on demographic characteristics. For instance, rural people are influenced by a variety of conditions that may be beyond the direct control of the development agents or the people themselves, but each condition tends to affect their participation in many ways. Observations have shown that development projects in the developing countries do not get to their target population in most cases because of the problem of design and implementation of those programmes. In most cases, the rural poor people

are excluded in one or both of the stages of development programmes' conceptualisation/planning and implementation.

In most developing countries of the world, poor and rural people's low level of participation in development programmes that are meant to improve their lot has become one of the major sources of worry in recent times. Most programmes that were designed by various governmental and non-governmental agencies to improve on the lives do not really get to them. However, some research works have made it clearer that countless barriers hinder these people, especially the women's effort to improve the quality of their lives, compared to men. These include less access to crucial resources such as information, educational skills, and training. Besides, they are less represented in decision making both within and outside the household, to the extent that they have to get permission from their husbands to attend or be involved in some activities outside the home (Tilley-Gyado, 2000). Against the foregoing background, there is an assumption behind this discourse that a lot of factors hinder the participation of poor rural women in various development programmes initiated by different government regimes in Nigeria, and Benue state in particular. The discourse in this paper is based on an inference from an empirical study conducted among rural poor women on their participatory actions towards various development programmes that were introduced by the government at various times in history.

Objectives of this discourse

Among other issues, this paper discusses the extent and limits of poor, rural women's participation in development programmes in Nigeria, using Vandeikya area of Benue state as an example. Precisely, the paper presents facets of women development programmes in the area, social and cultural factors associated with their low participation in the development programmes, including the interface between expected benefits from the development programmes and the women's participatory action.

Brief on the Vandeikya People and their Social Structure

Vandeikya is one of the twenty-three local government areas in Benue state, with Vandeikya as the administrative headquarters. Ushongu binds the local government area in the north, in the east by Kwande, in the southeast and south by Cross River State, while Konshisha local government area is in the west. It has a total of 161, 863 people, according to 1991 population census. Tiv is the major ethnic and indigenous people in the area and the major language spoken around the area, while other ethnic groups such as the Igbos, the Jukuns, and Hausas who are regarded as strangers are also seen in some numbers. Beside, Vandeikya, the local government headquarters, there are other villages namely, Ihugh, Tsemker, Tsar and Gbem that constitute

the local government area. These villages are sparsely populated, and mainly inhabited by farmers.

The major economic activities of the people of Vandeikya revolve round agriculture and trading. Farming which is the major occupation of the people is practiced in the villages, where family heads own farmlands with polygamous households to enable them meet up with the labour force needed for their farm work. Yam is the major crop cultivated and produced by the farmers, among other food crops such as cassava, guinea corn, millet, bean seed etc. Cash crops produced include groundnut, cocoa and tobacco. Tilley-Gyado, (2000) reported that the agricultural produce of the people have been bountiful from which excesses are transported to the neighbouring states like Cross-River, Ebonyi and Anambra for sale.

In Vandeikya there are social and infrastructure facilities in the local government area, such as Banks, Insurance houses, hospitals of different categories, educational and vocational institutions of higher learning, remarkably college of education Vandeikya that act as catalysts in developing the area. There are also several primary and secondary schools, both private and public owned. Besides, there are road networks that link the town and villages in the local government area and beyond. Observation from the area shows that most of these social and infrastructure facilities are concentrated in Vandeikya town, the local government headquarters and the only urban centre in the area. The surrounding villages that make up the local government area are lacking in most of these basic social and infrastructure facilities.

The social organisation of the Vandeikya people is not different from what obtains in other parts and communities of Tivland. Tivs are traditionally segmentary in their organisation, where there is no clear-cut central administration that can lay claim as the general overseer of the Tiv, even though there is a contemporary and a very recent arrangement that positions the *Tor Tiv* as the head of the entire Tivland. Villages, which are further fragmented into lineages form the basis of social and political organisation of the people. Each lineage is made up of different families and is headed by the eldest man (Bohannan, 1954). This practice as it is known with the Tivs in general is also obtainable among the Vandeikya people. It is a culture setting that pays great reverence to the men and the elderly, which implies that the society is both patriarchal and *gerontocratic* in nature. Given the above context, the female population is seen and regarded as second class citizens and people who could only be seen, but not heard. The whole scenario as the case may be keeps on breeding fear in the minds of policy makers and development agents on the survival of women based development programmes and projects in the area, and of women's participation in the development programmes in the area.

Facets of Women Development Programmes in Vandeikya Area: A synopsis

Before the advent of Family Support Programme (FSP) in the local government, successive governments had made their impact by establishing development programmes that aim at eradicating poverty and improving on the life of the people. In 1987, the wife of then Military governor of the state Col. Ishaya Baknut introduced Better life for Rural Women (BLRW) programme in the state, which was initiated by Mrs. Marriam Babangida. In this programme, farming of rice and cassava, rabbitry, piggery and yam production were carried out where rural women were mostly involved. Even beyond these projects, the women were also excluded and schemed out of the process during the implementation of the Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DIFRRI)

How Family Support Programme (FSP) Came to Vandeikya

Family support programme (FSP) was introduced in Benue state by the wife of then Military administrator of the state and first lady, Mrs. Grace Obademi on 28th March 1994. In the maiden address by the first lady to the wives of local government area chairmen, she noted that the programme intends to normalize the existing crisis in the family, which were mostly the inability of the families to meet their basic needs, giving the whole society a new life through material support to the family unit in order to arrest national crisis as it affects the family subsystem, and consolidate socio-economic well being of the family members. Following the structure and organisation of family support programme in the state, FSP came into being in Vandeikya Local Government area in 1994 through Mrs. Rachael Iorpev, the then first lady of the L.G.A.. Since then, the programme recorded progressive success in rural women mobilization in agricultural production, political awareness and health programmes (Feese, 1999).

Women Development Programmes, After the FSP

After the family support programme, or in concurrence with it, Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) was established and launched in March 1997 by her Excellency, Mrs. Maryam Abacha. The FEAP message and gospel were also transmitted to the various states and local government areas, through the wives of the governors and local government chairmen. Like other and previous related programmes, it was expected to transform the rural area and provide employment opportunities to them. Beside, the main intention behind FEAP agenda was to bring about the economic and social empowerment of the low-income group of women in the local government area. Family support trust fund, which was an integral part of the programme, was created to provide counterpart funding for government programmes.

Framework for Understanding Poor Women's Low Participation in Development Programmes

Theoretically, the issue of women subordination has been approached from divergent perspectives that have various interests, but with ultimate focus on uplifting and emancipating women through development processes. Some feminist studies on women reveal that male supremacy over women has continued for centuries due to many factors, which include patriarchal idea that obscures the history of women. Patriarchal system, according to Schuler, (1987) affects women's potentials by limiting them mainly to reproductive and nurturing roles. More substantively, Walby (1990) theorized patriarchy as central to the feminist understanding of many social relationships in the society. She identified six patriarchal structures, which restrict women and help to maintain male domination in the society. These consist of paid work, patriarchal relation with the household; patriarchal culture; sexuality; male violence towards women; ethnicity and class.

From the sexual oppression perspective, Firestone (1972) opined that sexual oppression was the first and most fundamental form of oppression, which brought about stratification. She provides a very clear explanation for the origin of the twin issues (oppression and stratification). One of her main proposition is that men and women were created equally and not differently privileged. Her major thrust is that inequalities and division of labour between men and women arose directly from biological differences, which produces a form of social organisation that could be referred to as the biological family, which the men took to their advantage. Ortner (1974) agrees with Firestone on the sexual oppression theory, that women are universally oppressed and devalued. However, she claims that it is not biology as such that set the pace for the oppression, rather, the way in which every culture defines and evaluates female biology that determines the place of women in such society. The believe hinges on the fact that if the universal evaluation of woman changes, then the basis for female subordination would be totally removed.

Like Firestone and Ortner, Rosaldo (1974) also argued that women have been disadvantaged in every known society, where they lack generally recognised and culturally valued authority. Even though, Rosaldo accepts that biology is the basis for women's oppression, she propounds an indirect link between the two. It is the interpretation that ties women to rearing of children and keeping domestic chores, and their biological makeup that leads to their disadvantage and subordination in the society, rather than their biological make up on itself.

In sourcing for other explanations, Marxist and socialist feminist views could be useful in the understanding of women's oppression and subordination. The Marxists/socialists school of thought sees capitalism rather

than patriarchal practices as the principal source of women's oppression and subordination, where the capitalists are the main beneficiaries. Like other radical feminists, they see women's unpaid work as housewives and mothers as one of the main ways in which women are exploited hence; other productive activities of women are also taken for granted.

According to the Marxists, represented in the views of the Central Committee Communist Party of Peru (1975), through the centuries, the exploiting classes have sustained and imposed the pseudo-theory of the "deficient feminine nature," that has served to justify the oppression which up to now women experience in societies in which exploitation continues to prevail. This situation is continually reiterated in the religious and spiritual understanding of women as human beings in Jewish and Greek societies, who at one time in history believes that women are females because of certain qualitative faults. That way, the Jewish men's prayer: "Blessed be God, our Lord and Lord of all the worlds, for not having made me a woman" and conformity by the Jewish women who pray "Blessed be the Lord who has created me according to his will," clearly express the contempt the ancient world had for the woman's condition. These ideas also predominated in Greek slave society; the famous Pythagoras said "There is a good principle which has created order, light and man and there is a bad principle which has created chaos, darkness and woman;" and even the great philosopher Aristotle pronounced: "the female is female by virtue of certain qualitative fault," and "the character of women suffers from a natural defect" (Central Committee Communist Party of Peru, 1975)

Marxism, which is the ideology of the working class, conceives the human being as a set of social relations that change as a function of the social process. Thus, Marxism is absolutely opposed to the thesis of "human nature" as an eternal, immutable reality outside the frame of social conditions; this thesis belongs to idealism and reaction. The Marxist position also implies the overcoming of mechanical materialism (of the old materialists, before Marx and Engels) who were incapable of understanding the historical social character of the human being as a transformer of reality, so irrationally it had to rely on metaphysical or spiritual conditions, such as the case of Feuerbach.

Just as Marxism considers the human being as a concrete reality historically generated by society, it does not accept either the thesis of "feminine nature," which is but a complement of the so-called "human nature" and therefore a reiteration that woman has an eternal and unchanging nature; aggravated, as we saw, because what idealism and reaction understand by "feminine nature" is a "deficient and inferior nature" compared to man.

For Marxism, women, as much as men, are but a set of social relations, historically adapted and changing as a function of the changes of society in its development process. Woman then is a social product, and her transformation demands the transformation of society. Based on this argument and the position of the Marxists, the discrimination against women with regard to participation in various development programmes in Nigeria, with reference to Vandeiyka, Benue State could be regarded as a slowdown process in the entire human development effort in the communities concerned.

The Rationale for Targeting Poor Rural Women through Various Development Programmes

The main reason why various development programmes in the local government like in other parts of the country target the poor rural women is glaring. Unarguably, women are the centre and hob of the family system, and as such, programmes that aim at improving the life of the family without putting women, as the main target appears to be fruitless. Women of Vandeikyha have contributed immensely to all areas of human endeavour in their society as farmers, business entrepreneurs, traders, and workers and as mothers. From the objective considerations, the women share unequal opportunities in the fruit of their labour because of persistent discrimination against them by their male counterparts. They are in the lowest classes and are deprived by their poverty, illiteracy, and ill health status, which make a majority of them in the local government area poor. From all indications, rural women who are also poor mostly engage in domestic chores, shackled in traditionalism and perpetuate the practices that cripple their well being, because of their ignorance, failing health ridden with superstition (Nwabara, 1995).

The above text reconciles the fact that women are poor because they are deprived, but did not leave out the fact that they remain the centre point and engine for family advancement. It is against this background that Ikejiani-Clark (1995) recognised the urgent need to better the life of women in order to achieve the desired goal in development. She opined that achievement of substantial growth in production depends partly on women and progress towards more just societies, which must include greater equality for women. For her, Federal government should give greater attention to all public efforts meant to eradicate absolute poverty, reduce hardship and despair by establishing policies and programmes that will enhance and broaden women's political, economic activities and their access to productive resources. The implication of the above in that national economic crisis in terms of poverty would be solved if families acquire the basic necessities, starting from the women who form the nucleus of the family.

Social and Cultural Factors Associated with Women's Low Participation in Development Programmes in Vandeikya

Countless barriers such as religion, culture, capital, self evaluation among others hinder women's efforts to improve the quality of their lives in many societies, especially in the developing ones. Compared to men, women have less access to crucial resources such as information, educational skills, training, health etc. In relation to what obtains in Vandeikya area of Benue state, factors such as patriarchal nature of the society, low level of education, domestic duties, location of projects, perceived or expected benefit from the programme could explain why rural poor women are not participating actively in various development programmes that are aimed to improve their lives.

The patriarchal nature of Tiv society, which Vandeikya is one of the local government areas, is very strong. Pertinent issues within the patriarchal context of this society include male dominance and exclusion of women in decision-making. This manifests when most of the development programmes such as FSP and FEAP are initiated in the area without consultation of the womenfolk, or at least understand their view. They are not represented in decision making, both within the household and in public life as a whole. Majority of the women interviewed are of the opinion that before the idea of the various development programmes were put to practice, they knew nothing about them. One of the research interviewees and a participant in the programme says,

Our own is to do what the men have already agreed on for us. We are not regarded as important when the times for taking decisions come. But we are conditioned to obey the decisions of the men, even when we feel that we are at disadvantage. When the people for the FSP came, they consulted with our traditional ruler and family heads. Their decisions were then made known to us women later. The purpose of the FSP and how it will benefit us was relayed to us through second persons. We did not have direct audience with the people that brought the project.

And also similar to other programmes they are usually by-passed by agricultural advisers and project officers, who prefer to discuss first hand with the men. The reason for bypassing them whenever an external contact is initiated was summarized by another woman, in her own view,

Every thing depend on how we, women are treated. Our elders believe that it is not the woman's job to negotiate with an outsider, even if the matter directly concerns the women. The women see us as people to be taken care of, in any thing.

Quite different from the issue of originating projects, in actual participation, most women do not have the free will to participate in the programmes because they have to get permission from their husbands to attend meetings

or involved in such programmes (Tilley-Gyado, 2000). According to the women, it is seen as disrespect when a woman decides on how to manage herself, even, her own time. In every thing outside home, a husband should know the movement of his wife. One of our research interviewees opines that,

Women do not go anywhere they like any time. Before you go anywhere, your husband should know where and when you are going and when you are coming back. Here in our place people will start calling you names if they feel that you do things without the full consent of your husband. We need permission to come for the weekly meetings of FSP. If you do not get permission from the man of the house and even tell him where exactly you are going, he may start suspecting you, he may even start beating you.

From the domestic point of view, it is evident that Tiv women from Vandeikya had low participation in the various programmes designed for them because of their overburden with domestic duties. Tiv women are generally very domesticated and believe most in what concerns their family first. This cultural norm made them to consider participating in the various programmes as secondary issue. Most of them complained that they have little or no time left to participate in other activities, including development programmes in their community. For instance irregular participants gave reasons based on the number of children they had, the age of their last children, and their load at homes as some of their distracting issues (Obioha and Tilley-Gyado, 2004). The study revealed that a majority of the respondents who are supposed to participate in the FSP programme in Vandeikya area have more than five children. This has an implication that most of the women have many children to take care of at home. Similarly 75% of the women indicated that their last children's age were less than five years. This indicates that majority of the women still have to share their time to look after their children who are less than the standard school age, and time to attend FSP development programmes. This has an implication on the level of participation of the women in the sense that most of them are young, and of high reproductive age. Given this situation, it appears that the women have to allocate more time, not just sharing it, being at home than doing any other thing else including attending the development programme activities regularly and punctually.

The complaint from the women that domestic work load is responsible for their inability to participate fully in the programme is very realistic from what other scholars have found. For instance, Adeyeye (1980) who commented on time use within the rural household, opined that women are occupied throughout the day with activities such as house keeping and childcare, which limits the time they devote to development activities thereby slowing down their pace of involvement in various programmes. Having children who are less than school age alone may not contribute

significantly to slowing down the pace of women's involvement in development programmes, rather a combination of this with large family size reduce overall women's labour market participation significantly (Oppenheimer, 1980; Hudis 1976).

Low level of education contributes immensely to the low level participation of rural women in their development programme as only 30 % of the women studied possess high school certificate and above. This factor hinders them from taking active part because their deposition of inability to read and write incapacitates them from becoming executive members of the programmes in their localities. Most of the respondents who participated in the FSP programme are illiterates where as their executive members who run the programmes are educated with urban residence status (Tilley-Gyado, 2000). The study reveals some of the feeling of the poor women with regard to their educational attainment. Commenting on a deep seated regret for being an illiterate, one of the participating women maintains that,

We, the rural women have a lot of problem in following this programme because we cannot read and write, even our names. Because of this, only very few of us are the executive of the programme. What happens in most cases is that women who live in the cities are conditionally chosen to be our secretary and president. We were told that they could interact well with the government people who may not know how to speak Tiv language. We were also told that they would represent our interest and present our demand any where without fear (*Translated from original Tiv language*).

The low level of education and in some cases, the absence of formal educational qualification, which makes the women vulnerable to exploitation, creates fear in them as they feel that they will be cheated if they get too deeply involved in anything with people of higher educational status. This deposition does not equip them with confidence, which they require to excel and communicate fluently. Most irregular participants were discovered to be illiterate wives of farmers who seem not to understand what the programme is all about as a result of poor enlightenment, coupled with their inability to read.

Another important factor that limits the chance of rural poor women in active participation in the development programmes in the area as evinced in (Tilley-Gyado, 2000) is the location of various projects of the programme. Tilley-Gyado observed that in spite of the fact that majority of the target population of FSP programme are in the rural areas 70.1% as against the members that reside in urban centres 29.9% most of the projects were located in the urban centre, which is the local government area's headquarters, Vandeikya.

Apart from culturally related factors, expected benefit from the programmes contributes tremendously to the low level of women participation. Rural women in Vandeikya are mainly illiterates who do not know what the programmes are all about. Their expectations on the benefits of the projects to their life is very remote, consequent to their inability to understand what the programmes are all about, hence their low participation in the programmes could be understood. In summarizing why low participation an interviewee says,

How do we participate or come out of our houses for this programme when we feel that we are not gaining any thing. When better thin comes to us, the executive members who are also more educated than we are will take over every thing. We do not even know when anything is given to us.

This linkage is not out of place because it is a known fact that individuals participate in organisational programmes due to some expected interests and benefits. This is noticed in the work of March and Simon (1958), who explained from the perspective of Bernard-Simon's theory of organizational equilibrium that a person's motivation to participate in an organisation is a function of valued inducement provided by the organisation and the individual's perceptions of other alternatives available. However, another conclusion from Hoffman (1974) entails a symbiotic relationship between benefits and membership participation. The more members take part in their organisation, the greater the amount of benefits and as the actual or perceived amount of benefits increase the greater the participation.

Finally, the regular and incessant changes in the government and their policies create a lot of confusion for the poor rural women who cannot even distinguish between and among the programmes. This has resulted in many women's loss of interest in these programmes. The situation as the case may be does not give room for any meaningful development with short periods of government shifts, programme changes and refocusing. In most aspects of human development, disruptions, distortions and abrupt changes bring about discontinuity and abortion of ideas, which women development programmes are no exception.

Meeting the challenges of poor rural women's low participation in development programmes

Based on the findings of this study in relation to what obtains on the low level of women participation in development programmes in Vandeikya area of Benue state, a lot of challenges could be adduced to be facing development programmes and projects in the area. However, in order to get the situation out of the present predicament, it is necessary for women to realize that they can only be effectively integrated into development on three main grounds: they themselves must have a clear definition of their role in development; they must ensure continuity and outline their priorities in

carrying out approved programmes. This position pre-supposes that the women folk should be ready at any time to embrace development projects. They could also be out to seek what they are supposed to do and how they are supposed to go about them.

Apart from what the women themselves are required to do, there are some other issues that require not just the women alone, but the entire society. For instance, various women societies must always lay down the definite strategies that could be enduring throughout a society's lifespan. This relates mostly to the capacity building efforts of the women through various cooperative formations. Sweetman (1995) enunciated that if women's chances of weathering crisis could be understood, then, the complexity of women's lives, how their vision of what are achievable changes according to resources, and the security of the external environment should be appreciated. That is to infer that women's condition could only be improved if they get involved in such ventures that are realistic and could earn them better income to boost their well-being. Using what happens in Postwar Rwanda as an example, some women began to form groups to help one another with agricultural production to build houses and start up thrift and credit schemes to finance income-generating activities (Mukarbuga and El-Bushra, 1995). Following this specific example, in Vandeiykya, if women can come together and form viable associations, better credit facilities can be secured from the government and even externally from international development donor agencies.

Similarly, since one of the remote hindrances of rural women's participation is dearth of money, the government should therefore act in a way to ameliorate this problem by granting fund to them through an organized micro soft credit facility scheme. Such a scheme should be designed as a veritable means that targets towards meeting the impending challenges, because micro-credit scheme is one of the most compelling and powerful tools that can be used in order to meet the overall mandate of reducing poverty in the society. Even though the government had established various projects, there is still need to clearly provide soft credit schemes not for individual persons to trade as it has been the case in Nigeria, but for use of groups in government designed development programmes.

Distance to the development projects could be made non significant as a problem if government should make various development centres to be close and accessible to the rural women. This could be done if project centres are deliberately cited in the rural areas since the bulk of the target population for various development programmes live in these areas. Besides, the issue of accessibility factor should not be on space consideration alone, rather, accessibility factor also should address the amount of "voice" input. At development meetings, freedom of speech should be encouraged so that

every participant, irrespective of educational and social status can feel free to lay their voice and views on various matters at the meetings. There should not be very rigid rules guiding the operations of the centres and matters affecting these centres and programmes should be discussed at grass root level so that solutions to women's problems are arrived at unanimously. This strategy will enable the full participation and consequently full absorption in the development programmes because they will feel a sense of belonging.

Important also is the issue of traditional practices and cultures that contravene the basic human rights of women such as religious and traditional taboos that do not serve any good purpose. Various traditional rights to property, which exclude women, should be re-defined. Obviously, the participation of women in social and economic development programmes in the Vandeikya area has been slowed down as a result of some aspects of culture and tradition of the people. On this note, Obioha (2003) enunciated from his insight among the Igbos of southeastern Nigeria, who are also patriarchal instituted with other similar social organisation structure as the Tivs, that the poverty situation of women had remained, and appears to be escalating among them due to some traditional property rights which exempt women from total ownership.

Finally, alleviating the burden of domestic workload on women in order to facilitate the process of women's role in the various development programmes is essential. Women's tasks should be made simpler and less crowded by encouraging men to participate in domestic chores, as the whole society is transforming into a labour economy where the value of women's labour could be priced and paid for its worth. This entails the redefinition of the laid down traditional division of labour among the people.

Conclusions

This paper has discussed the various factors that militate against women in Vandeikya Local government Area of Benue state from participating fully in development programmes that are initiated to better their lives and thereby contributing significantly to the development of the society. Prominent among these factors are the patriarchal nature of the Tiv society, distance of the development centres from the rural women, domestic overload, low educational qualification, large family size and children and young age of their children, usually less than five years old. These challenges as they are identified need to be tackled urgently if there is an honest desire by the policy makers to eradicate poverty in households. However, some hints were provided in the last section of this paper on the various ways and means the challenges could be met in the society.

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